



ENSURING SAFETY IN THE GAME OF FOOTBALL: THE ROLE OF THE REFEREES

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Abstract:

This paper focused on the role of referees in ensuring safety in the game of football. It highlighted the concepts of referee, officiating and posited how referees can ensure safety in football. It concluded by stating that most incidents in the game of football matches are as a result of spectators and fans reaction to unsafe acts of the referees and that referees who are major producers of football should not be a source of regret to consumers of the game. It recommended among others that; there should be comprehensive and well organized training schedule for referees. The assessment for promotion of referees should include practical sessions. Modules of safety courses should be integral part of referees training schedule and safety seminars and workshops should be organized for referees locally and internationally.

Keywords: ensuring safety, football, role, referees

1. Introduction

The objective of teams in the game of football is to score by maneuvering the ball into their opponent's goals. This task is characterized by variety of activities which place a great demand on the referees who are usually at the center of the action. Apart from the activities in the field of play, the referees have the crowd which is a major characteristic of football environment to contend with (Frosdick, 1997). The referees are actually in charge of the entire football activity. Football as a human activity has obvious risks associated with (Ellicot, 2004). These risks can be managed to a large extent by referees whose awareness of the risks and concern for the participants trigger their safety consciousness because it takes safety knowledge and appreciation for an individual to

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be safety conscious. A careful analysis of the functions of the referees would prove that refereeing is a call to safety. Therefore every referee is a functional safety personnel. Wavne (1997), posited that safety is everybody's right as such should be fathomed in every human activity. Safety according to Nwankwo (2014), is the state of being protected against consequences of harm. A state of being free from conditions and situations considered undesirable. Safety in this contest refers to freedom from risks associated with football.

2. The Concept of Referee and Officiating

A referee is an official who is entrusted with the responsibility of ensuring that sport is performed according to the rules of the sport. He is a judge whose functions are guided by the rules of the sport. Wikipedia (2017) referred to a referee as a person of authority who presides over the sport from a mental point of view ensuring that the rules are enforced. This document further stated that sports have different titles for their officials, in football, the term referee originated in association football when umpires who were team representatives could no longer resolve disputes in the field of play, a neutral official was added and the umpires became linesmen. This was part of a major restructuring of the laws of the game in 1891. In this paper, a referee is an appointed official who has the authority over the entire event of the football before, during and after the game.

Every football match is controlled by referees who have full authority to enforce the laws of the game. It is pertinent to note that all match officials in the field of play are referees, their nomenclature only depict their role in a particular match (Nwankwo, 2017). The referees have the liberty to take decisions to the best of their ability according to the laws and the spirit of the game (International Football Association Board (IFAB) (2017).

Nwankwo (2014) revealed that poor officiating is a determinant of risks associated with football organization in Nigeria. Also, Asagba (2014) found out that the body language of referees is a predictor of hooliganism in Nigeria football league. These and other studies are pointers to the need for the referees not to just identify their role but to live up to expectation in ensuring safety in football.

Hazard of diverse nature exist everywhere during football event, having people in a confined space as in football environment is always very risky hence Protect Direct (2014), stated that there is a litany of disasters involving supporters in football game. Risks associated with football game encompass all types and categories of risk. Everyone involved in football game is exposed to Health, Safety and Environment (HSE) risks of diverse nature (Murphy, William & Dunning, 1990). While physical health risks are recognized and managed considerably, psychological health risks are yet to receive attention. The psychological health risks include; anxiety, depression, stress etc. exposure to these health risks precipitate situations and conditions which are responsible for incidents that result to rivalry of opposing team supporters, attack on

the referees, stamped, total breakdown of law and order in football environment (Ladani, 1999) which makes the beautiful game unsafe.

Officiating is the practice of enforcing rules and regulations in sports, in order to ensure quality supervision and enhance safety among participants. In football, officiating entails the interpretation and enforcement of the laws of the game to promote 'Fair Play' which is an essential feature of the game.

3. Ensuring Safety in the Game of Football

The role of the referees in ensuring safety in the game of football is very vital hence the referees should improve their safety knowledge. This role would be efficiently performed through the achievement of all round fitness of the referees. All-round fitness of the referees refers to physical, mental, emotional, psychological and social fitness which are subsumed in the characteristics of effective referee.

Ensuring safety in football basically entails the exhibition of adequate knowledge of the laws of the game, accurate interpretation of same and clear demonstration of fairness in the field of play (Alex, 2017). In order to achieve these, the preparatory stage of the referees should include programmes that would bring about total fitness and inculcation of the 7 'Cs' identified by Soccer Referee U.S.A. (2014), as characteristics of a good referee.

These characteristics are;

A. Competence

This refers to thorough understanding of the current laws of the game through constant study of the same and participation in pre-season and mid-season seminars and workshops. The referees' ability to interpret and enforce the laws of the game effectively would be a giant step towards the control of psychological traits that could threaten the safety of football environment.

B. Compassion

This refers to expression of empathy to injured players and motivation of assistant referees to give maximum support. When the players have confidence in the referees especially as it affects their welfare in the field of play and the assistant referees are carried along by the referee, there would be a high level of cooperation which will bring out the beauty of the game and reduce the level of risks.

C. Confidence

This refers to the carriage of the referees. They should see themselves as being in-charge. The referee should allow their confidence to rise to the occasion when challenged. They should be ready to take disciplinary actions promptly. No situation should intimidate the referee. They should take appropriate action promptly and be prepared to defend it. Referees should not for any reason be scared.

D. Communication

The referees should have clear and constant communication through agreed signals. This agreement should be done during pre-match discussion. There is need for quick verbal communication with the assist referees where necessary. Also eye contact by

referees to check the tempo of the game is very important. Clear and constant communication through whistling, signals and words where necessary direct the game and enhance safety.

E. Consistency

This refers to the application of the laws firmly throughout the duration of the game. Referees should interpret and enforce the laws of the game without showing any form of favoritism to players, teams or even period of play. Players, teams and periods of play should be treated equally. That is, no preferential treatment should be given at all.

F. Courage

The referees should be courageous to take decisions that could affect the outcome of a match. Boldness is a requirement for effective refereeing. The referee's level of boldness promotes safety in the field of play which affects the entire football environment.

G. Conviction

The Referees should be convinced that their decisions are right hence they should be composed after taking crucial decisions. They should maintain their decisions and avoid being influenced by sentiments. They should maintain high integrity for their safety and that of football environment.

4. Conclusion

The need for referees to identify their role in ensuring safety in football is paramount in their responsibility as officials. The fact that unsafe acts of the referees in most cases, prompt reactions which result to incidents that render football environments unsafe is not in doubt. The referees who are major producers of football game should not be source of regret to the consumers of the beautiful game.

4.1 Recommendation

Based on the afore mentioned, the following recommendations were made;

- 1) There should be comprehensive and well organized training schedule for referees.
- 2) The assessment for promotion of referees should include practical sessions.
- 3) Young people should be encouraged to choose refereeing as a hobby so that they would be monitored by good referees.
- 4) Referees level of performance level should be considered in determining whether the referees should remain in a particular league or not
- 5) Good referees should be motivated especially through training, locally and internationally.
- 6) Ethics of refereeing should be held in high esteem and defaulters should be sanctioned appropriately.
- 7) Modules of safety courses should be integral part of referees training.
- 8) Safety seminars and workshops should be organized for referees locally and internationally.

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